DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BLOGGERS ROUNDTABLE WITH ROBERT WISHER, DIRECTOR OF THE ADVANCED DISTRIBUTED LEARNING INITIATIVE FOR THE OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE SUBJECT: THE DEFENSE DEPARTMENT'S PLANS TO INCORPORATE GAMING AND SIMULATION TECHNOLOGIES INTO ADVANCED DISTANCE LEARNING MODERATOR: CHARLES "JACK" HOLT, CHIEF, NEW MEDIA OPERATIONS, OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE PUBLIC AFFAIRS TIME: 2:00 P.M. EDT DATE: WEDNESDAY, MAY 21, 2008

MR. WISHER: (In progress.) Okay, thanks for the opportunity for me to describe the activities we have within our ADL, or Advanced Distributed Learning Program, within the Office of the Secretary of Defense.

We are under -- I am under the Under Secretary for Personnel Readiness, Dr. Chu, and I have been with this program for about six years now. And what ADL is about, and I'll explain how games will fit into that, is about delivering high quality training and education any time, anywhere, to the force, DOD components, service members, et cetera, for that.

We have made excellent progress in bringing standards and specifications for what would in the past be termed computer-based instruction into a format that's interoperable and could be delivered -- rendered through web browsers. And now we have thousands of courses within DOD that conform to our reference model called SCORM, Sharable Content Object Reference Model. And our next stage for the ADL program is to look at ways that we can integrate in with other perhaps less structured learning environments -- simulations, games, technical publications, maybe some very select Web 2.0 technologies. We're still investigating the values of those.

But I'm here talk about how we're going to proceed, what our intentions are within the gaming area. The office I sit in is at the crossroads of technology-based learning and training policy, so if we see things and know a value for different training technologies, we are able to bring them into the policy so the services can take advantage of them in a uniform way for that.

What we have is -- is structured learning environments. Those are doing pretty well. But games offer such a tremendous motivational component to users for that. You just hear the stories, maybe your own kids are doing that or, you know or -- there's stories of hours and hours and hours spent of games for that. And obviously they're learning something, because they're getting to play the games better. But our big question is how to -- our big question on the benefit of games is how do the knowledge and skills learned from those computer games transfer to real-life tasks in operational or training context for that?

So the value in the game, you're motivated. You're obviously learning. How would that parlay into some benefit within DOD for that?

We recently held a conference with the DOD tech users conference, and documented about 23 games that are now being used across all services in a training context for that. So the Marine Corps is very big. They don't -- they're not games, they're tactical decision- simulation aids, I believe, some clever name around that. But the idea is the same. You have narrow dip simulation, there's some entertainment value for that, and you learn.

What we intend to do within the office and the ADL program is to embark on a program over the next several years to discover, learn and disseminate of how to do this best. Games have been around for many years, and we in our program sometimes have to wait until they mature to a point where there is a mass interest in them, they -- we have known value for those, and how do we best take advantage of that in the future?

So what we're doing is, to my gaming overlord, Dr. Rick Blount is on the lead for me on that, is developing various working groups that have to do with standards about the games. Now let me dispel, we are not going to develop a standard for games. There's so much creativity, we'd be crazy to do something like that. What we want to develop is a way -- a standard way for games to talk to our structured learning environments. So we will be inside of one of our, let's say, learning objects, perhaps in a regular course, and then you'd launch from that into a game and spend your hours or days or however long in the game and then return to the structured learning environment with some performance data and a game that the learning environment can then make sense of.

So if you've been playing a game, maybe it has to do with some tactical decision making or others, and the game could notice you were strong on this and perhaps weak on that, that can be fed back to the structured learning environment as SCORM, and then you can get additional training on those areas you are weak in for that.

So in that way you take the benefits of what we have in SCORM and link them to the advantages of the game without upsetting the game. You go inside the game, you play that, and it's not sugar-coated or, as some researchers say, chocolate-coverage broccoli for that. You play the game full force and then come back to your environment. So that's one of the areas, looking at standards.

Another are the design principles, the relationship between the structural design and game design for that. That's an area we'll be working with. And by -- I mean, working with, I mean collaboration, partnerships with industry, academics, the gaming industry, others within the Department of Defense and other government agencies, and also international partners.

The third area is looking at business models for that. How do we make a case for the value of games? At some point, we're going to want to look at some dollar values, maybe some efficiency measures, maybe some effectiveness measures, that games are being (paid ?) with these types of metrics -- money spent, time to train, cost for training, et cetera, for that. And that would be -- all be external to the game.

A big area right now is communication, how do we convey to the many groups we have. And right now, we have started offering weekly webinars, so every Wednesday at noon there'll be a different topic. If you are interested in that, a very simple -- just send an email to games@adlnet -- one word -- dot

gov. That's games@adlnet. -- one word --dot.gov, and we will inform you of the programs for that. You're welcome to join us.

We also offer workshops, probably quarterly for that, on the different areas we have here. Conferences, we had one a couple of weeks ago. Some future activities we have, some participation in the large training conferences down the road for that. And obviously working with the web site on that.

Finally, an area we're interested in is having what we call the game industry DNA; in other words, what really constitutes a fantastic game for that, and trying to bring that over onto the DOD, kind of begin thinking about that. We have developed a roadmap that lays out all these -- (inaudible). We don't have a specific timeline on that, because we depend on help and assistance and guidance from others, to help put these data models together. But we're serious about doing this. It's something that we've been talking about for years; now we're putting this to practice for that.

And as we built SCORM, we're building registries, we want to build games in other areas right into that.

So that very broadly is an overview of what we're looking at at DOD with the ADL program, and how to take advantage of what games offer, and how to do it in an sensible and realistic matter.

So Jack, I'll turn it back to you.

MR. HOLT: All right, sir, thank you very much.

David, you were first online, so why don't you get us started.

Q Hi, this is David with War is Boring. So I -- I really don't know what you're talking about.

Can we try to back up and put this into plainer English for me? Are we talking about using commercial videogames for military training?

MR. WISHER: That would be yes.

Q Okay. So you mine the vast catalog of different, I guess, what, console and computer-based videogames, PC-based videogames, for ones that have some sort of military training utility?

MR. WISHER: Yeah. And also make our own, too. So it's not only buying things off the shelf, but other things that the services might want to develop and fund.

Q Okay. Well, I'm really interested in the off-the-shelf stuff that you just buy. So what kind of games are being used as official training tools?

MR. WISHER: Well, there's a couple that came out of DARPA for that. One is Tactical Iraqi, another is the Ambush Game. But on the commercial side, we have Cassandra, Doom, from the Marine Corps, Corrosion, Peacemaker. There are some internal games we developed, urban simulations for that. Delta 3-D, 24 Blue on the Navy side, there's about two dozen that we know about.

Q Okay. These don't sound like games I've ever heard of. So are we talking about two different things? We're not talking about -- when I think games, you know, I play Xbox, I have an Xbox, I've played Shooters and stuff like that. That's not what you're talking about?

MR. WISHER: That could be integrated as well. But things such as Microsoft Flight Simulator, you know, like that one.

Q Sure. Okay, so what kind of games are these -- these five or six you mentioned? Are they little -- first-person perspective --

MR. WISHER: They're mainly immersive environments, team-based first-person shooter type games, some related to cultural awareness, convoy training, where multiplayers are involved with that.

Q Okay. Yeah, that makes sense. Have you ever looked into more adventure and RPG-style games as training tools? MR. WISHER: Yes. World of Warcraft would be one.

Q And how is that being used?

MR. WISHER: I'd have to see -- it's primarily used in leadership courses for that, at the -- our war colleges.

Q Do you know which war colleges?

MR. WISHER: Most likely Army War College in Carlisle Barracks is one that has -- they probably have five or six games they're using for that.

Q What's the -- what can you possibly learn from World of Warcraft? World of Warcraft, in my experience, just makes you antisocial and pale. (Laughter.)

MR. WISHER: Well, there are strategies development for that; communications with others on your team; group objectives -- establishing group objectives; planning; areas for that. And any military operations require a lot of thought process, and the fact that you exercise that as a small group might parallel those that you do on an actual operation. And operations now involve not only, you know, the kinetic area, but non-kinetic -- winning the hearts of minds of others -- working with non-government organizations; working with other interagencies, not just the military; multinational aspects for that. So there are a lot of things that some of the games bring too that invoke you into new environments that wouldn't be typically purely military.

Q Okay. But do people take it seriously -- training with something like World of Warcraft?

MR. WISHER: Yes.

Q I would have.

MR. WISHER: Well, again, if they're looking to transfer the training, and if they know who the others are, and they're members of their units, as opposed to anonymous groups.

Q Oh, okay. So the other characters are their peers rather than just some guy

(Cross talk.)

Q -- okay.

MR. WISHER: Yeah. So it's often prior to deployment to an exercise. The group might play this against a real scenario that might be given in there. Ambush, for example, is a convoy trainer where they would have actual terrain outlined in Iraq, and as they drive their convoys through, things to look out for in villages, cultural features of the terrain and what to look out for in terms of slide roads, et cetera. So it's a mission rehearsal exercise for them.

Q Okay. Thank you very much.

MR. WISHER: Okay, you're welcome.

MR. HOLT: And Paul?

Q Hi, Paul McLeary from DTI. I'm curious what kind of feedback you've received from soldiers who've used these games or who've been training through the games a little bit, you know, as far as how helpful they find it, what they think you can do better and things like that.

MR. WISHER: One thing we've found, it's about time we had something like this. They're very satisfied with it. It's not maybe as realistic as an actual scenario for that. But I think it's the thinking they go through, the decisions they have to make, are something that they now confront in a game scenario that they don't have to. So when they get to the actual operations it's not the first time they've been there in a sense for that.

And some, for example, will have -- we have some experiences of, after people have come back from Iraq, of now having them sit through the ambush training device and saying, boy, I wish I had this before I went over there. And then they would give us feedback, and -- you need night scenarios, we do convoys at night; all these are daytime activities for that. So we get that feedback and improvements to what we might further design.

Q Has there been any sort of generational divide, like older soldiers or officers who aren't really -- you know, are having a harder time with, you know, incorporating the games in the training?

MR. WISHER: Yeah, there are. It's -- they haven't -- they're not the digital native, as that argument goes on that. So it's the younger soldiers, the one more likely to be driving the trucks, et cetera, who are taking to the technology and actually looking at ways to mod it as they go through. So there are some activities, some games, that you go ahead and create your own mods based on their scenarios.

Q Okay, thanks.

MR. HOLT: All right. Grim.

Q One of the things it seems like would be most immediately useful would be cultural and historical simulations to introduce soldiers to environments that they might have to do counterinsurgency- type operations in.

Have you considered the possibility -- or talk me through this a little bit what you are thinking about in terms of, you know, would you offer grants or contracts to academics to develop culturally, historically accurate scenarios? And then would you also then allow them the rights to produce these games commercially, which would give them the motivation to make something that would really be popular on the market that's sort of a really good game that people would like, not just a militarily accurate game?

MR. WISHER: Okay. A couple of parts. Let me answer the first on the expertise that academics and others might offer. We're sorely in need of subject matter experts on the cultural side -- anthropology, language areas, for example, that we have. And we now have a group -- the Human Terrain Project that looks at mapping out the cultural features in Afghanistan.

There's clearly the value that academics -- (audio break) -- the subject matter expertise. The models we're considering for co- development would be if some would build a game -- this is something we're still working through on how to do this -- we've had one example with the Joint Staff -- but if somebody were to partner and build the game and we provide some of the military expertise, they might provide some areas that are -- in culture, for example -- that we're not as familiar with, develop the game, and we would have use rights within the military, and then the other would have the commercial rights on the outside. But it would be something that you can get a DOD staff -- if it's -- meets our criteria and meets our requirement for that. And those are the kind of partnerships we'd like to look at in the future. Q So you would be open to games that would be then also releasable in some form, maybe with redacted content, so that there would be commercial money to be made as well as the grants or other partnership?

MR. WISHER: Yeah. They are interested in that. It's a matter of the way the contracts are written, and the IP for that is licensed or releasable.

Q Okay, thank you.

MR. HOLT: Okay. Nate.

Q Hi, Dave Dilegge of Small Wars Journal. I wanted to kind of carry Grim's question and comment a little farther. One of the things I've seen -- everything that's addressing irregular warfare and counterinsurgency points to education as probably being our biggest bang for the buck in getting these type of operations right.

A lot of the games that I think you've mentioned seem to be very tactical in nature and really focusing on force-on-force in a military -- (audio break). Have you looked at any other games -- well, one, have you looked at games or looked at how to develop games that would address all elements of national power on our side, and then -- and all those elements are -- are really being used at a tactical level these days, really the non-military task. And then how are you going to include the human element that Grim talked about -- I don't think you really addressed it that deeply -- but the local population and the human reaction, the human element. So I know there must've been a lot of efforts to model human behavior, and a lot of them have ended in frustration. So any commentary along those lines would be appreciated.

MR. WISHER: One area is looking at in provincial reconstruction teams where you in an integrated operation we have now the military working with State Department, U.S. Agency for International Development, International Red Cross,

local groups also in these other countries that must rebuild a country infrastructure-wise and also people-wise for that, bringing them back to, you know, some of the ideals that we would like to share with them. So in those cases that one might be modeled after a civilization- type game of how we would use that type of gaming genre for that. And now as we are working with our groups, we have a recent relationship with State on sharing the training, developing the common training for this. And the next step would be to develop a game-like -- strategy- type game to have that. So -- and then if you have multiplayers in that, you would have the reactions -- let's say, if we have players in multiple areas for that who somehow become involved, maybe there's a language differential that we factor into that. But there might be very different ethics and very different reactions to things that you take for granted that somebody, even your counterpart within the U.S. government might not approach the problem that way, if you're bringing too much military decision-making process, and not enough collaboration and consensus building, we'd want to realize that in a game.

Q Now the school houses that are using your distributed models right now, are they using them just within their organization, or are they reaching out. And as an example, I could see that a big plus for your program would be, not so much as internal games to each of the school houses, but, you know, each of the school houses, say, at the major level, lieutenant colonel level, might have one State Department student, and really to expand your program to include different schools and different entities, so you get really, you know, the interaction between the interagency and the military. Have you -- any thoughts along those lines?

MR. WISHER: Well, that's -- as we look at, again, the integrated operation piece for that, it's a matter of train as you operate is another motto we're developing besides train as you fight for that. And the way we operate are with many other entities for that. So as we extend that, it's not only training going to the same courses for that, but as we move into distributed learning, and okay, so we get the same course over the Internet, but when we get the synchronous interaction with the instructors, maybe an instructor from another agency for that, or the peer-to-peer relationships that develop in communications that occur, that would begin to, I think, reduce any of the tensions, mitigate some of those areas of risks that we have before, you. So you are now training together with a larger unit, not just the military side for that. And again, parlay that into a game, so you can have a very large scale development for that. These are all possibilities.

Q Jack, this is Bill Laudeman (sp) with the -- director of the Marine Corps Wargaming Center down here, I'm with Dave, and I wonder if I could ask a question?

MR. WISHER: Yes, sir, go right ahead.

Q Okay, thanks so much, Jack. Bob, I wondered, the discussion so far has been principally focused entirely, I guess, on computer simulations. Have you ever thought about the idea of a hybrid approach; that is, using the computer with a -- say, for instance, a board game in a seminar setting? And what leads me to that thought is the fact that, just thinking here, you and I could both be playing the same kind of, you know, computer game, and yet take away entirely different lessons, so at a certain point you go right and I go left, and you know, we suffer because of it, whereas in a seminar setting you get an opportunity to -- you know, to explain your ideas, to explain your

actions, and perhaps learn some lessons in that sense, plus get a, you know, sort of common sense of, you know, proper response to a given problem?

MR. WISHER: Yeah, we would look at employing alternate reality games, and, you know, maybe some virtual worlds kind of areas that would get at that. So you would blend it with other forms of instruction. Much as we have in the live virtual constructive on the simulation side, we might have a parallel in games where you are actually playing a game, and then maybe the constructive would be the board game coming in, and the virtual might be, you know, avatars or whatever feeding in based on rules and principles that govern their behavior.

MR. HOLT: All right. And did someone else join us? I was just going to check and see if -- Sharon, did you -- were you able to get on? I guess not.

All right, we've got just a few more minutes here left here. Any follow up questions?

Q Yeah, if I can, Jack.

MR. HOLT: Sure.

Q Dave Dilegge, again. A lot of the gaming efforts that you have discussed so far seem to be directed more at training and to education. How about in support of concept development and experimentation? Any issues along those lines?

MR. WISHER: Not formally for that. But one of my thoughts is, when you're designing a system, instead of building the system and then building the training data or perhaps game, maybe you'd start with a game and then build back towards a system. So see what's easy to use. See the natural interactions that people take, et cetera. And then have that feed into the design of the equipment or the command process you're trying to create.

It's much like instead of building sidewalks see where people walk first and then build a sidewalk on those pathways. So that would be something -- that wouldn't be -- I'm more on the personnel and training side. That would be more on the acquisition side for that. But I think it's a logical step to take for that. But I'm not aware of anybody specifically doing that, other than maybe in a basic research mode.

MR. HOLT: All right, anything else? Anyone else?

Okay, Dr. Wisher, thank you very much for joining us and being on the Bloggers Roundtable this afternoon. We appreciate it. And hopefully we can check in again and perhaps get an update here in a few more weeks or months or so.

MR. WISHER: Okay, my pleasure, Jack.

MR. HOLT: All right, thanks very much.

MR. WISHER: Thanks.

END.